

REVIEWS

AN INTRODUCTION TO NEUROSURGERY. By W. Brian Jennett, M.D., F.R.C.S. (Pp. xiii+326; figs. 64. 45s.) London: Heinemann Medical Books, 1964.

THIS is an excellent compendium of modern neurosurgical practice. Its only misfortune is that it appears in the same year as two similar textbooks with the same declared aims from the pens of Northfield of the London Hospital and Mullan of Chicago University. Its aims are described on the dust cover—it is for all the neurosurgeons' specialist colleagues and general practitioners, for the junior staff and ancillary personnel in neurosurgical units, as well as for postgraduates. As this embraces practically everyone engaged in medical practice, one is bound to ask how many of them will read a book as comprehensive as this in order to understand modern neurosurgical principles, and discover to what extent the neurosurgeon can now help them to treat their patients.

Given a satisfactory answer to this question, one can say unhesitatingly that it is a good book. It is completely up to date and deals simply and systematically with almost every problem familiar to the neurosurgeon of 1964. Because it is so comprehensive, it is didactic and uncompromising in style. Each problem admits of only one solution. This leads inevitably to over-simplification and it is easy to quarrel with some unequivocal statements—for example, that where a localized carotid stenosis is discovered it should be operated on, that the sac of a spina bifida cystica should be excised within forty-eight hours of birth whenever it is technically feasible. These are both statements partially true and requiring careful qualification if presented to "specialist colleagues and general practitioners."

It is probably unfair to cavil about dogma being too dogmatic in a short book. What the reviewer found more difficult to accept in an Introduction to Neurosurgery is a certain lack of balance in the relative importance of major topics. Although the author introduces the book with the statement that brain tumours no longer take up most of his attention, exactly half the manuscript is devoted to them, and intracranial infection, which becomes progressively more rare, takes up almost as much space as surgery for vascular lesions which is now a constant neurosurgical preoccupation. Head injuries cover one-quarter the number of pages devoted to tumours, although they are of much greater importance to the doctor on the fringes of neurosurgery for whom the book is written.

These objections apart, the reviewer was impressed with the amount of solid, accurate information compressed into 300 pages, and found the illustrations well chosen and clear.

This is an easily read "Introduction" for those who feel they wish to be introduced.

A. R. T.

INJURIES OF THE SPINE. By M. Beckett Howorth, M.D., Med.Sc.D., and J. Gordon Petrie, M.D. (Pp. 343; figs. 221. 120s.) London: Baillière, Tindall & Cox, 1964.

THIS is a well-illustrated North American monograph on a most important subject. The various types of fracture in the different parts of the spinal column are described fully, as is treatment. Anterior spinal fusion is gone into in detail, though other operative measures are given their proper place.

The chapter on cervical spinal injuries is the "pièce de résistance" with eight pages of bibliography bringing up the rear in this section. In this connection there are some twenty pages of reference in various parts of the book, the reading of which would be a monumental effort if one ever embarked on it.

A good book of reference for an orthopædic surgeon, to be read slowly and carefully as the set-out and style are difficult to get into without effort and deliberation.

The book contains an historical chapter by George Bennett, M.D., Sc.D. This is of academic interest, but does nothing to increase the practical value of the other chapters. R. J. W. W.